

VZCZCXYZ0020
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSG #0885/01 2961904
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 231904Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0189
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0113
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 0110
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ OCT MONTEVIDEO 0068
RUEHQ/T/AMEMBASSY QUITO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 000885

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/10/23

TAGS: PGOV SOCI CI PHUM

SUBJECT: LOW LEVEL VIOLENCE CONTINUES IN CHILE'S INDIGENOUS SOUTH

REF: SANTIAGO 826; SANTIAGO 843

CLASSIFIED BY: Carol Urban, DCM; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Three recent attacks in Chile's Araucania region, the heart of indigenous Mapuche territory, have riveted attention once again on continuing disputes between indigenous groups and the state in southern Chile. The Coordinadora Arauco Malleco (CAM), a violent Mapuche group with a history of conducting attacks, claimed responsibility for recent incidents against trucks, toll plazas and the police. The GOC claims that small criminal groups are responsible for the violence and multiple GOC Ministers have explained that the recent attacks are not connected to larger indigenous issues. While some believe that the election cycle is exacerbating the conflict, the violence has yet to emerge as a hot button topic in the Presidential campaign and President Bachelet's approval rating remains at a record high level. END SUMMARY.

Violence Continues in the Heart of Mapuche Territory

¶12. (U) The low level conflict in Chile's Araucania region, the heart of indigenous Mapuche territory, continues to flare, with several violent attacks in October. The most recent clash took place on October 20 when a group of seven hooded individuals seized two trucks, released the drivers, burned the trucks and exchanged gunfire with members of the Carabineros, Chile's uniformed police. There are unconfirmed reports that one of the individuals was wounded but in hiding. A local radio station identified the individual as a 17-year-old youth who was reportedly not involved in the attack but hunting in the area when hit by police gunfire. Other notable events include an October 12 attack on a toll plaza and an October 18 shooting that left two members of Chile's investigative police injured. The October violence comes on the heels of clashes earlier in the year that included the August 12 death of a Mapuche activist, the second fatality in the last two years (Ref A).

¶13. (U) The Coordinadora Arauco Malleco (CAM), a violent group with a history of conducting attacks, took responsibility for the recent violence in an email message to media outlets on October 20. The CAM also declared war on the Government of Chile (GOC) and its members renounced their Chilean citizenship.

GOC: Police Resources are Sufficient, Small Groups of Criminals are Responsible

¶4. (C) Interior Minister Perez Yoma and Secretary General of the Presidency Jose Viera-Gallo convened a meeting of top regional officials on October 22 to assess law enforcement efforts. That meeting took place after Javiera Blanco, Undersecretary of the Carabineros, rejected hints from the Public Prosecutors' office that more police forces were needed in the region. Carlos Fernandez from the National Intelligence Agency told Poloff October 21 that officials have an idea of who is behind the attacks and hinted that arrests are forthcoming.

¶5. (SBU) The GOC has tried to separate the recent attacks from the larger issue of indigenous relations. Viera-Gallo, who was named coordinator for Indigenous Affairs on August 26, stated that small criminal groups are responsible the violence. Undersecretary of Interior Patricio Rosende said the attacks have "nothing to do" with Mapuche claims. Nevertheless, the GOC invoked a controversial anti-terrorism law to prosecute four Mapuche individuals who were allegedly involved in the toll plaza attack. The Pinochet-era law includes stiffer penalties and restricts the civil liberties of the accused during investigation and prosecution. Many human rights activists and international observers say that the government's use of the law unfairly targets the Mapuche (Ref A).

"This isn't the Capital of Afghanistan"

¶6. (SBU) The GOC has also come under increased criticism from business leaders in the region. The National Agricultural Society recently suggested that the rule of law must be re-established in the region before the GOC pursues development programs that include land buy-back programs for indigenous communities. Viera-Gallo flatly rejected the idea that the region is out of control, stating that the Arauco province "isn't the capital of Afghanistan." He also chastised government critics for "doing a favor" for the criminals by exaggerating their capabilities. (Ref B describes how this conflict has frequently been sensationalized.)

¶7. (SBU) Interestingly, the recent violence has not yet emerged as a hot button issue in the upcoming presidential election. The three main candidates have discussed issues such as crime and citizen security, but there has not been a focus on the violence in the Araucania region or indigenous issues. The violence has also had no impact on President Bachelet's approval ratings, which remain at record-high levels. However, some observers believe that the elections are contributing to the recent uptick in violence, with the Concertacion government eager to show voters that it is taking the problem seriously, and Mapuche activists hoping to pressure the government into concessions before December's voting.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Despite the most recent outbreaks of violence, Viera-Gallo is correct to assert that the rule of law remains intact in the region. While worrying and illegal, the attacks are sporadic and clearly target property rather than people. The GOC claim that these attacks are perpetrated by small, criminal groups may very well be accurate, but that description increases public perception that the police should be able to identify and arrest those responsible for the attacks. If the violence continues, the issue will remain a thorn in the side of the Bachelet administration - and perhaps its successor. END COMMENT.
SIMONS